THE
# RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. II. December 25, 1936 Tebet 11, 5697 No. 17

## EDITORIALS

THE SEMI-CENTENNIAL OF THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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*By Edward L. Israel*

## THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF JUDAISM

*By Milton Steinberg*

## CORRESPONDENCE

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# A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

**Dear Readers:-**

**We have devoted considerable space, in the last few issues of the RECONSTRUCTIONIST, to the discussion of the question: "Can RECONSTRUCTIONISM be best advanced through organization?"**

**The question has evoked a wide response. Some of our correspondence has been published. Future issues will contain many other letters which have come to us. In the meantime, however, we are eager to get some idea of the extent to which "organization" has already taken place in the form of "Reconstructionist Groups" devoted to the study and discussion of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST magazine, or "Judaism As A Civilization," or "Creative Judaism," or "The Jewish Reconstructionist Papers." We have been apprised of the existence of several such groups. There are undoubtedly many more of which we have not been apprised.**

**May we ask you, therefore, to inform us whether you belong to such a group in your community? Your cooperation in this regard may cast significant light upon the whole question of "Reconstructionist organization."**

***—The Editors***

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THE
# RECONSTRUCTIONIST

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## EDITORIALS

### The Semi-Centennial of The Jewish Theological Seminary

THE Jewish Theological Seminary of America is celebrating its semi-centennial. It was established in 1886 by a number of rabbinic and lay leaders who were opposed to the entire philosophy of the Reformist movement, which at that time, under the leadership of Isaac M. Wise, was making rapid headway. The Seminary took as its model the institution at Breslau, at the head of which stood Zacharias Frankel, who sought to checkmate the Reformist movement not by pitting against it the intransigent Orthodoxy of a Samson Raphael Hirsch, but the conception of "historical Judaism." In that conception was implicit a spirit of fidelity to the essentials of traditional Judaism, and of loyalty to the entire Jewish people, combined with a profound regard for objective truth in the matter of research into the past, and a keen appreciation of the realities of life in the present. That this was the attitude of the founders may be inferred from the fact that Dr. Alexander Kohut was invited to become the first Professor of Talmud in the institution. In the first years of the present century when circumstances required that the Seminary be reorganized, the same attitude prevailed, as evidenced by the call which was extended to the late Solomon Schechter, who was himself a devoted disciple of Frankel and an ardent protagonist of the Historical School.

The Seminary has, accordingly, placed its emphasis not so much upon theology and adherence to a creed as upon a contentful Jewish life, a life based upon knowledge and practice, illumined by the intelligence and inspiration that come from the urge to translate scholarship into terms of action. It was inevitable, therefore, that the faculty and alumni of the Seminary should have succeeded in excelling both in the field of scholarship and in the field of contemporary Jewish affairs. On its faculty, the Seminary is privileged to have men who are supreme in their respective realms of knowledge: Louis Ginsberg, in the realm of rabbinics; Israel Davidson, in the realm of medieval Jewish literature, and Alexander Marx, in the realm of Jewish bibliography. In addition, the Seminary houses today the largest collection of Jewish literary treasures. These circumstances render it the most important center of Jewish learning in the world.

As a consequence of the spirit that permeates the institution, its graduates articulate a Jewishness which is both traditional and modern. From its rabbinical department, rabbis have gone forth to serve congregations, in America and elsewhere, where their influence has been

widespread. At least 250 congregations, consisting of approximately 125,000 people, are served by these rabbis. This large element of Amrican Jewry constitutes the vital elements in Jewish life. The present Chief Rabbi in England is a graduate of this Seminary. From the Teachers Institute of the Seminary, educators have gone forth who have blazed a new path in Jewish education and have come to occupy most of the crucial positions in that field. To mention but four: Dr. Isaac Berkson, who for a number of years was in charge of education for the Jewish Agency in Palestine; Dr. Alexander Dushkin, who now heads the new Department of Education at the Hebrew University; Dr. Emanuel Gamoran, who conducts the educatioal work of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; and Dr. Leo L. Honor, director of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Chicago, all have had their outlook moulded by the Teachers Institute. In short, those who received their training at the Seminary, for whatever function they were to perform in Jewish life, foster maximum Jewish education, rally to the support of the rebuilding of Palestine, and are training a generation of Jews who have remained substantially loyal to Jewish life and to the Synagogue.

Since its reorganization in 1902 the Jewish Theological Seminary of America has been sustained in the main by those Jews who, though Reformist, were so warmly identified with Jewish life that they were eager to foster any institution that served the highest needs of the Jewish people. The masses of East-European Jews, on the other hand, have reaped the benefits of its work. Now that this large element of American Jewry has come of age, so to speak, it is time that they assume greater responsibility for the maintenance and expansion of the Seminary. They must begin to take over the larger measure of its support. We sincerely hope that the inspiration of the semi-centennial celebration will reach the hearts of thousands of Jews in this land, and impel them to realize that this institution is *their* institution, that it serves them and that they must learn to serve it.

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## A Constructive Plan for Polish Jewry

THE tragic plight of Polish Jewry has been a source of deep sorrow to American Jews for the past fifteen years. Sincere efforts have been made to mitigate the sufferings of these unfortunate Jews. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the American Federation of Polish Jews have, year after year, raised large sums of money for relief and reconstruction. Food, clothing and shelter have ben provided, and wherever possible, young Jews have been given training in crafts and industrial skills. The Zionists have attempted to facilitate the emigration of the greatest possible number to Palestine. Others, with the aid of the Russian government, have sought to settle numbers of Polish Jews in Biro-Bidjan.

Despite these manifold efforts on their behalf, Polish Jewry remains a shambles. Three and one-half millions of them face a dark future. For that reason, we welcome heartily the new proposal, recently made by Samuel C. Lamport, of New York, for dealing with this tremendous problem. Mr. Lamport recently returned from a long tour of Europe, during which he studied the problem at first hand. Deeply moved by what he saw, he returned to the United States with a plan which he now presents to American Jewry for consideration.

Mr. Lamport begins with the conviction that neither relief nor emigration can offer significant amelioration for Polish Jewry. Something must be done to enable them to continue to live in Poland; their economic life must be rehabilitated. The Joint Distribution Commitee has, indeed, recognized the need for occupational redistribution and has opened the necessary training schools for that purpose. Recent statistics indicate that already the effects of that course of action are discernible.

The percentage of Jewish students in classes of commercial science has dropped from 15.4 per cent in 1929 to 6.8 per cent in 1935, while, on the other hand, the percentage of Jewish students increased from 11.6 per cent to 12.3 per cent in classes teaching technical science.

But it is one thing to train Polish Jews to work with their hands, and quite another to find an outlet for the goods which they produce. To find such outlet is the basic purpose of Mr. Lamport's plan. He seeks to get the cooperation of all existing Jewish organizations for the purpose of stimulating the sale in the United States of commodities manufactured by Polish Jews. Of course, only those products which do not conflict with American industries will be handled. According to Mr. Lamport, many unique commodities are produced by Jews in Poland; in addition, some of the manufactured goods of Polish Jewry would replace those which formerly came from Germany. We are assured that the Polish-Jewish workers will not be exploited; provision is being made to insure living wages. Mr. Lamport's proposal has many significant implications. Besides constituting an original and cogent plan for helping Polish Jews to help themselves, the program would be advantageous both to Poland and the United States as a whole. Poland is at present a large purchaser of American products; but Americans are having more and more difficulty in retaining this trade because there is so unfavorable a balance of trade on the Polish side. Poland is gradually giving its business to other countries which purchase large quantities of its own products. On the other hand, the United States is attempting to restore recovery through the stimulation of its foreign trade. The plan suggested would help to create a more favorable balance of trade with Poland, would stimulate American business and would help to improve relations between the two countries. In addition, the situation of the Jews in Poland might be improved in other than economic ways. If the government realizes that the Jews of Poland are a factor in raising the economic level of the country, its attitude toward them might very well be modified. Instead of regarding them, as it does today, as a drain on the body-economic, it will seek to cooperate with them in an enterprise which benefits both the Jews and Poland.

Mr. Lamport himself, wisely enough, does not regard this plan as the panacea of all Polish Jewry's ills. But if it succeeds in giving employment to the vast numbers of unemployed weavers, glass-blowers, craftsmen, artisans, who today are idle, and raises the general economic status of the country, it will earn the everlasting gratitude of countless Jews in Poland who are at present in the depths of despair, and the equal gratitude of American Jews who today see no end in view for the perennial relief campaigns which offer no ultimate solution. We hope that American Jews will have the vision to evaluate Mr. Lamport's proposal at its true worth, and the flexibility to experiment along these new lines. It deserves the cooperation of every existing organization, because it appears to be really constructive, and it occupies the highest rank in the Maimonidean hierarchy of Jewish *zedakah*.

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## The Vatican and the Spanish Situation

RECENTLY the Vatican appealed to all religious denominations to denounce the persecution of religion in Spain by the "communist" government in Madrid. This appeal is disingenuous and should mislead no one, not even the Catholics. It richly deserved the denunciation heaped upon it in the survey made by Professor Harry F. Ward for the Methodist Federation for Social Service.

The Vatican blithely assumes that the government in Madrid is communistic and that it does not represent the real Spain. This assumption is palpably untrue. We must never lose sight of the fact that the present government in Madrid, which is making so heroic a stand against Franco's Insurgents, was duly and democratically

elected by the Spanish people. The Rebels are thus trying to overthrow by force a government which the people themselves voted into power. Franco, on the other hand, has again and again declared his fascist sympathies, and has trumpeted to the world his intention, if he is successful, to set up a fascist dictatorship. The issue in Spain is thus clearly one of fascism versus democracy. The fact that the communists constitute one element in the Spanish Popular Front does not make the Spanish government communist. It is a favorite device of reactionaries to brand any activity or movement or group as "red" which may have the support and sympathy of the communists. Even Roosevelt was called a communist by the Republicans because the communists openly declared their preference to Roosevelt over the Hearst-controlled Landon. The war in Spain is not between fascism and communism, but between fascism and democracy.

Nor should we be swayed from our sympathies with the cause of the Loyalists by the Vatican's cry of religious persecution. There undoubtedly is some truth to the reports about the burning and pillaging of churches and the confiscation of church properties and funds. We must not be deceived, however, by the lurid atrocity stories, nor by stories conveying the impression that an entire Church and the whole order of clergy are being cruelly persecuted by an atheistic and communistic junta in Madrid. The Ward survey seems to indicate that many of the lower clergy are with the people and are ready to lay down their lives for the government. And if Church properties are being confiscated and the clergy robbed of its power, the Catholic Church has only itself to blame. For the Catholic Church in Spain has been as reactionary as it was in France before the French Revolution, and as it is today in Mexico and other countries. It has maintained a strangle-hold not only upon the schools but upon the government and the life of the people, and has rarely used its power to raise the Spanish masses from the poverty and ignorance to which they had sunk. It resisted the will of the Republican government, set up after Alfonso's abdication, to separate church and state, and to take education out of the hands of the Church. It has sabotaged the Republican government in its attempt to put through reforms which were long ago put through in other states. And today it is aiding in every way the cause of Franco's rebels. It is thus aiding and abetting a group of rebels who wish to overthrow a legally-constituted government.

Jews more than any other group have pleaded for religious tolerance. Jews more than any other group know what it is to be persecuted. Jews should be and usually are the first to extend a hand to the persecuted and the downtrodden. But there is a limit even to tolerance. Tolerance does not and cannot mean tolerance of intolerance. And surely the Catholic Church in Spain has been reactionary and intolerant. Let not the appeal of the Vatican in the name of religious tolerance deceive religious people anywhere, Jews or Christians, as to the nature of the situation in Spain. Those who are on the side of true religion will know where their sympathies lie.

# A Critique of "Reformism"

*By* EDWARD L. ISRAEL

*Introductory*

JUST a little over fifty years have passed since the rabbinical leaders of Reformist Judaism in America met together in the city of Pittsburgh and formulated a "platform." Despite the fact that many founders of that platform seemed to have little regard for the inviolability of religious tradition, biblical or talmudic, the older generation of Reformist Jewish leaders in America since that day in 1885 has adopted an attitude toward the "Pittsburgh Platform," as the document is called, which approaches veneration. For years, suggested changes in Reformist Jewish ideology were rejected with the summary verdict that "they are in opposition to the Pittsburgh Platform." Although the Zionist movement did not arise until over a decade after the formulation of this document, it was repudiated and has continued to be denounced by the elder statesmen of Reformist Judaism on the grounds that it is contrary to the Pittsburgh Platform.

Every student of the development of human institutions can testify to the fact that all reformist movements, no matter how lofty and latitudinarian in their origin, soon tend to become fossilized and to build up a rigid code or "Shulhan Aruk" of their own as unyielding as that from which they wish to liberate themselves.

My simile is Jewish. The generalization, however, applies to most reformist movements, religious, and non-religious as well.

There is, however, in the Jewish Reformist movement, a constantly growing group which deplores this tendency toward fossilization, and which is insisting that the semi-centennial celebration of the Pittsburgh Platform be used as an occasion for change. And while there is an old guard which would greatly prefer to allow matters to remain as they are, even these conservatives cannot consistently deny a fundamental philosophy of reformism which insists that religious ideas must reformulate themselves from time to time according to changing times and concepts. There have arisen, therefore, in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, several different attitudes with regard to what should be done to the Pittsburgh Platform. On the extreme right are those who would do nothing at all by way of change, or as little as possible. Moving leftward among the membership we find those who are substantially in agreement with the Pittsburgh Platform but who admit the need of certain minor changes. The middle-of-the-road-ers, as usual, would like to have a series of papers on the subject and a detailed study and then a lot of reports. The moderate leftists are ready for a drastic reformulation both theologically and sociologically in consonance with a forthright Jewish cultural and Zionistic atmosphere. But there is a group of extremists beyond these who would like to see the Central Conference of American Rabbis simply drop the Pittsburgh Platform and put nothing else in its place. These insist that Reformist Judaism, like British law, is built up on the actions of each annual convention of the rabbis. The resolutions that are passed and the statements of the reports that are ratified constitute the theological, social and cultural basis of Reformism. No other platform or program, so they say, is necessary.

## I

Any intelligent evaluation or critique of Reformist Judaism must necessarily be preceded by a presentation of the author's own interpretation of Reformist Jewish history. Criticism is an intensely personal function. It is utterly valueless unless the reader understands the author's interpretation of basic historical facts. For, as is apparent to every unbiased observer, his-

torical facts have no absolute significance. The manner in which they are presented constitutes in itself a critique of the movement whose story they attempt to tell.

This is why most of the comments on Reformist Judaism, especially by my Reconstructionist colleagues, are lacking in certain essentials. Reformism, as we term it, when viewed by an outsider, may appear in a certain objective perspective. But that objectivity is not always a virtue —nor does it always imply a higher truth. Those whose entire lives, past and present are bound up with Reformist Judaism, may perhaps be able to give the historical facts with a greater sympathy and understanding of the psychology of so-called Reformism than the Jew who stands off and views the processes from a distance— and often with an antagonistic bias.

I was born into and reared in the Reformist branch of Judaism. The only religious training I ever received before entering the Hebrew Union College was in a Reformist religious school. My parents' home was Reformist Jewish. My subsequent rabbinate has been entirely within the Reformist group. That I became an ardent Zionist despite my rearing in the strongest sort of anti-Zionist atmosphere, is not the result of any atavism or nostalgia. Nor was it due to congregational pressure. In fact, everything in my personal and professional life seemed destined to lead me in the other direction. My personal changes of opinion, therefore, are the result of those same forces which have been acting upon Reformist Judaism to alter it in these latter days. They arise from a contemplation of the changes that have taken place in the world in general and Jewish life in particular. I feel that I am much more of a genuine Reformist Jew than those who have refused to budge from the static dogma of early Reformism. Because, even as those early Reformist principles were the result of the impact of world events upon German and American Jewish life of the day, so the newest trend of Reformism is the result of the more recent developments in the world as they have affected the Jew.

The Jewish Reformist movement began in the early nineteenth century in Germany. It grew out of the inadequacy of so-called "Shulhan Aruk" Judaism to cope with the new Jewish life in the midst of the struggle for Enlightenment and Emancipation. Countries like Poland, Russia and Roumania which were practically untouched by the political modernism of the late 18th century, were also untouched by Reformism. It is a mistake to imagine that we can explain Reformist Judaism solely on the basis of Haskalah. There was a Haskalah movement in Eastern Europe but no formal Reformism. Nor is it accurate to try to explain Reformist Judaism solely on the basis of the struggle of emancipation. It is the concatenation of the two against the background of the unique conditions of Germany which furnishes the reason for Reformist Judaism.

The reaction of orthodox leaders of the late 18th and early 19th centuries to the Maskilim was a natural and a justified one, from the orthodox point of view. Modern Enlightenment was bound up with certain non-religious or anti-religious factors. These orthodox leaders were as correct in regarding it a menace to ghetto Judaism as are Catholic priests in countries like Mexico and Spain in looking upon secularism in education as a menace to the Faith. As a matter of fact, the real thing which the orthodox Jewish leaders feared was not modern Enlightenment but its secular aspects. The results of this secularism in weaning people away from religion are as evident in the Haskalah of Russia as of Germany.

Reformist Judaism was therefore, from one point of view, an honest effort to preserve what it regarded to be the essentials of Judaism, and at the same time to adopt a sympathetic attitude toward the inevitable sweep of secular Enlightenment. Some may quarrel with the early Reformists with regard to the extremes to which many of them went in their compromises. Some may maintain that what they really did was to "sell out" to secularism at the expense of sound Jewish

tradition. The very real question remains, however, as to whether the compromises were not dictated by events rather than chosen at will. No accurate observer of early Reformism will maintain that these leaders wanted to do anything but save what they regarded as the essentials of Judaism. They may have been mistaken as to what constitutes those essentials. Many of them were far more enthusiastic for modern culture than for Jewish tradition. The indisputable fact, however, is that they provided a means for thousands to remain within the fold of the Jewish religion who would otherwise have sought the avenue of escape through apostasy. This is a far fairer judgment than the oft-repeated accusation that Reformism provided an easy road to assimilation and extinction.

The basic lines of development of early Reformism were founded on a fairly correct assumption that secular Enlightenment produced in its devotees certain psychological changes which made them temperamentally incapable of accepting "Shulhan Arukism." The Jew who found intellectual comradeship outside the Jewish world necessarily wanted to show that all of his culture, religious and otherwise, was adaptable to that world. We today may laugh at the battles which were waged over such an inconsequentiality as the matter of removal of hats in prayer. To most modern Reformist Jews, it makes no real difference whether we pray with hats on or off. But that is because we live in an age when religious forms do not have the same significance as a century ago, and when unique religious ceremonies are given an indulgent esthetic approval rather than regarded as divisive factors. In judging the fight for "hats off" in worship, we have to consider the attitude of the times in which it took place.

Amid the political philosophies of "fraternity" and "equality" which accompanied the intellectual progress of the early 19th century, "equality" was often interpreted as "uniformity." Thought should be free. "Liberty" applied to the realm of conscience. But in the material sphere, men wanted to be like each other. They affected similarity in dress to break down the invidious distinctions between noble and bourgeois. And those same desires for "uniformity" motivated the intellectually "enlightened" Jews in their modifications of the forms of worship.

Thus, the emphasis of much of early Reformism was on the externalities of religion even to the extent of changing Jewish tradition. The "hats" question, the family pew, the introduction of instrumental music into the service, the rearrangement of the physical appointments of the synagogue — these and other changes in externalities came about as a result of this situation. Reformist apologetics may have given more philosophical explanations and may have justified the actions on historic grounds. The fact remains that the times dictated the development on grounds which were often little more than expediency. That, to us today, is nothing which requires apology. It is the simplest, truest and most admissible argument. Religion — Judaism or any other — is a way of life. As such, it must accommodate itself to the life about it. That was the job of early Reformism. And in many respects, it did a decidedly good job. Its break with tradition was the sort of break which always accompanies a revolution. Its effort today to find its way back to a greater sympathy with those traditional moorings from which it broke is also understandable in the light of contemporary conditions.

The Reformist introduction of prayers and sermons in the vernacular was simply an amplification of the processes of cultural emancipation. Zunz may have proved that vernacular sermons were part of Jewish tradition, but even had no one been able to prove this point, such a course would have been the only one that Reformism could follow. Zunz's work is a fortuitous example of the fact that certain elements in the Reformist movement wanted to show that Reformism was not a wilful break with traditional Judaism, and that there was some regard for precedent; but no one really believes that the

absence of such proof from the past would have deterred the early Reformists.

Modern Conservative Judaism has had more time to rationalize its reforms. It had the example—in many instances unfavorable—of Reformism's lack of regard for tradition in adjusting Judaism to the modern world. Therefore Conservative Judaism has used the technique of Zunz on a more conservative scale. It has faced the same primary demands of meeting changing conditions. When this cannot be done in harmony with tradition—as for example, the problem of the *agunah,* or the deserted wife—there is a definite effort to build up a new law to meet the needs of the times. The main difference between Conservative and Reformist Judaism is that the former has not had the disadvantage of working under the same pressure as the latter. It is much easier to make a stab at being consistent when you have both plenty of time and the example of the mistakes of a pioneer.

## II

But cultural emancipation was only the minor consideration of Jewish life in Central and Western Europe during the early 19th century. The hope for political emancipation was far stronger. The leaders in that hope were quite naturally to be found among the culturally enlightened Jews.

From the days of the first French National Assembly on through the time of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin, into the midst of the reactionary Germany after 1815, the charge was constantly made that the Jews could not be given citizenship because their religion permitted a civil loyalty only to Palestine. The traditional prayer-book and the Messianic beliefs were trotted out by Jew-haters to prove this point. And since the early Reformists were the leaders in the fight for emancipation, they took steps to see to it that Judaism should be theologically compatible with modern citizenship as well as esthetically compatible with modern culture.

Recent events have clearly indicated that on the long range basis, the early Reformist movement was incorrect in its assumption that the repudiation of the prayers for the restoration of Zion, the Temple cult and for the coming of the Messiah would constitute the permanent answer to the opponents of civil rights for Jews. Ironically, the refutation has come in Germany, the very land where this Reformist idea originated. Nazism has shown that the early Reformists made a bad compromise. Yet this is no reason for judging them harshly. The young Russian revolutionaries, face to face with justifying their own right to participation in the new Russia, followed their Gentile communist comrades, and threw religion over entirely. The Reformist founders at least wanted to preserve what they felt to be the Jewish essentials. They would not have their people follow after the multitude in an acceptance of the state religion of Christianity in order to buy citizenship, as modern young Russian Jews today would have their people accept the Soviet state religion of atheism.

Whether the action of these early Reformists accelerated the granting of citizenship rights to Jews in Germany is a question. The progress of civil emancipation in England, where no such compromise was made, would lead one to infer that this repudiation of the tradition of Zion was not necessary at the time, any more than it was justified by subsequent events. But then, England is unique; and too close a parallel with the continent can hardly be drawn. All that we can say is that, however honest the motives of the early Reformists, their apologetic philosophy with regard to Zion and dual allegiance has broken down completely in modern times.

In reality, their negation of race and nationhood collapsed at the very outset. The main body of Reformist Judaism not only refused to countenance and practice intermarriage but it continued to regard a born Jew as Jewish no matter how far he removed himself from the synagogue. This has its expression to this day in even

the most anti-Zionistic circles where Christian Science Jews are members of Jewish clubs and lodges, and avowed atheists are elected to leadership of Associated Jewish Charities under the direction of Reformist Jews who theoretically claim that we are a distinct people only with regard to our religion. In comparatively early days of the Reformist movement, Jewish fraternal orders of Reformist Jews were organized more or less in the spirit of protest against synagogual domination of Jewish life. The anti-racialism and anti-nationalism of Reformism has been a ridiculously inconsistent thing. Inherently, it was obviously only a stalking horse to answer our critics.

We should not by any means infer that there were not in the Reformist ranks many thoroughgoing universalists who were in fact troubled by the particularism even of "Shema Yisrael," insisting that it be changed to read "Shema, B'nai Adam." Nor should we close our eyes to the fact that some young Reformist rabbis look upon Zionism today as akin to that chauvinism which is the curse of the world. These, however, were—and are—not the majority. The great mass of Reformists were at heart quite parochially Jewish. Their opposition to Zion was really an expression of their apologetics rather than a positive affirmation of faith.

The saddest effect of the anti-Zionistic attitude of Reformism was the manner in which it helped to widen the gap between the German and East European Jew in the early 20th century. Had there not been this divisive issue, many of the ills which still plague Jewish life and divide us into warring camps would have been healed to a far greater degree than at present.

## III

The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 was the outstanding formal crystallization of the ideas and ideals of Reformist Judaism as they had developed for almost three quarters of a century. There had been various efforts at some formulation of principles both in Germany and America prior to this famous Pittsburgh meeting. None of these gatherings, however, or their deliberations and conclusions had anywhere near the proposed effect or the general acceptance which was accorded the Pittsburgh resolutions by all American Reformism. Even at the present time it in the Reformist group as the storm-center or focal point from which to move forward or backward. What, then, is this Pittsburgh Platform?

1) It begins with a note of mixed universality and particularism. Every religion is regarded as sacred in that it is a search for God. Judaism, however, is regarded as the highest expression of man's religious strivings.

2) The Bible is interpreted from the inspirational rather than the revelational point of view. It is a sacred record of the consecration of the Jew to his mission as priest of the One God. Because of the "inspirational" approach, no conflict is found to exist between religion and modern science.

3. A differentiation is made betwen the ephemeral and eternal verities of the Bible. Ceremonial legislation is to be regarded in the former class, binding only as long as it has significance for the present. The moral verities are everlasting. Among the ephemeral pieces of legislation alleged to be without modern religious meaning are the dietary laws and priestly legislation.

4) The Jew is asserted to constitute not a nation but a "religious community." A return to Palestine or to the sacrificial cult or to a Jewish state is utterly disavowed.

5) There is a firm expression of a desire to preserve historical identity with the past. The scholarly viewpoints of Zunz and Geiger that reforms in Judaism are possible and consistent without a break with the real line of Jewish tradition are embodied into the Platform.

6) A "goodwill" note is struck. A word of appreciation is bestowed on the monotheistic aspirations of Christianity and Islam. The hand of fellowship is extended to all who would cooperate in establishing a reign of truth and righteousness.

7) The chief theological reforms consist of a repudiation of a belief in bodily resurrection and a literal Heaven or Hell. The doctrine of spiritual immortality takes their place.

8) The document gives expression to the religious duty of a strong sense of social justice.

All in all, the ethical spirit of the Platform is on a very high plane. We may attack it for its inability to discern the eternal value of ceremonials which may only *appear* meaningless and which may really have a subtle divine or humanly group significance. We most certainly can take exception to its break with the historic past in the repudiation of Palestine as anything but a sweet memory. We may also feel that its tendency utterly to disregard rather than fall in line with and modify rabbinic tradition was utterly unnecessary. But from the modern point of view of ethical emphasis—particularly its efforts to present to the intellectual Jew a plausible Jewish bond containing a large measure of his religious heritage—it is, despite whatever its enemies may say against it, a sincere and lofty document. It is on practical, historical grounds, especially in the light of the subsequent development of Jewish and world life, that the Pittsburgh Platform has demonstrated its inability to cope with our present problems.

Before we undertake the negative analysis of the movement, let us, for the sake of the record, review the many interesting changes which Reformism wrought in the synagogue and its services. Let it be made clear at the very outset that the motivating principle of all of these changes was to modernize, estheticize and intellectualize the synagogue according to what the Reformist leaders felt were the imperative and vital demands of the day if Judaism was to be preserved in a modern culture.

As has been stated already, equality of the sexes was introduced. Family pews replaced the woman's gallery. Confirmation was substituted for Bar Mitzvah, although in many Reformist congregations a modern version of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony has been reinstituted in addition to the Confirmation. Instrumental music and mixed choirs became the rule. The ritual which follows the general outline of the traditional service has been abbreviated by the condensation of many proyers and by the elimination of many others, including practically all of the *piyyutim* and *selihot*. The *aliyot* in connection with the Torah reading, and the sale of Mitzvot have also been done away with. Some section of the Torah passage of the week is read either by the rabbi or by the cantor which this latter dignitary is still used. Many prayers are read in English. The number of these Hebrew prayers differs according to the individual congregational usage. A sermon in English is part of most services. Second day holiday observance has been dispensed with, and Tisha B'ab not observed at all. In many congregations there is a late Friday evening service. Others—only a few and in large cities—have a Sunday morning service with the use of the weekday ritual. In some congregations, the Friday evening or Saturday morning service has been eliminated because of lack of attendance, although this is not the custom and does not have the official sanction of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

A number of Reformist Jewish prayer books have appeared during the history of the movement in America. These have all given way to the Union Prayer Book which was first produced by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1897. In this book, the theology of the Pittsburgh Platform is accepted. The book has undergone several revisions. At present another revision is in preparation. It is highly significant that among the several optional Friday evening services which have already been issued by the revision committee, one is definitely Zionistic in tone—a startling departure from previous Reformist tradition.

It should be noted that most of these ritualistic changes by Reformist Judaism were solely in response to demands of the times. The late Friday evening service, for example, was instituted because of very poor attendance at the earlier service.

Many Conservative and even Orthodox congregations have been forced to the same measure, although they call these late services Assemblies or Forums and retain the earlier service as well, even when hardly a handful attend. Sunday services with sermon or lecture were instituted for the same reason. The Sukkot and Pesah observances which are increasingly difficult to maintain in a non-agricultural modern Jewish life are being implemented by the participation of children in harvest services and by the revival of the seventh day of Pesah as a memorial service. In other words, there has been even from the beginning a definite effort to conserve. Sometimes the fullest measure of effort was not used, but in other instances, as, for example, with the Confirmation, Reformism has preserved with increased significance a holiday which is fast losing its hold on Orthodox communities.

The violation of the Sabbath by work has never been officially sanctioned. And while the Reformist rabbis have never declared themselves officially on the subject of intermarriage, the attitude of most of its members is one of strong opposition. Most Reformist rabbis will not officiate at an intermarriage unless there has been an acceptance of the Jewish faith by the Gentile. The one official concession which has been made is that circumcision is not absolutely required of such adult males, although the conversion pledge includes a promise to circumcize all male children. Marriages are performed without the *huppah* or the breaking of a glass, although many Reformist rabbis use the more conservative ceremony on request of the couple. The old form of *ketubah* has given way to a modern simplified English form. Religious divorces have been dispensed with, and the legal divorce is held to be religiously binding. Because no positive codification of the details of the Reformist ceremonial observance or lack of observance exists, the degrees of conservatism vary with individual congregations and rabbis. It is, therefore, possible to give no more than this general picture.

Reformist Judaism of America is our primary concern because it is in the United Staes of America alone that it has flourished. Except for a few congregations in the British Empire, Reformist Judaism as found in Germany and elsewhere closely resembles the Judaism of the left wing of the United Synagogue. American rabbis in attendance at the meetings of the World Union for Progressive Judaism soon discovered this fact. We therefore deal solely with American Reformism in this final portion of our analysis.

*(To be concluded)*

## Realities of Jewish Life

In September 1936, 5,695 immigrants entered Palestine. Of that number 173 belonged to Class A (those who have £1,000 or more).

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The deficit incurred by the Palestine Administration during the six months of April-October 1936 amounted to £25,000 in spite of unrest, loss of life and property, and cost of defense.

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"The Voice of Truth" is the name of a Jewish paper that has begun to appear in Arabic. It is addressed chiefly to the Arabic laboring class.

The most recent statistics show that the Jewish population in Berlin includes 150,000 religiously affiliated and 60,000 of mixed marriages. Since August 1, 1935 the religiously affiliated Jews in Berlin increased by 4,500.

* * *

8,000 of the present population in Palestine come from Austria. They have formed an organization known as *Hitahdut Olay Austria.*

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Half of the 170 movie theatres in Vienna belong to Jews. Of the six largest (seating 1,000 and more) 5 belong to Jews.

# The Religious Aspect of Judaism

*By* Milton Steinberg

IT is a curious anomaly in the life of contemporary Jews that as a rule they are little concerned with the Jewish religion or with the intellectual problems associated with it. The typical Jew of today is likely to be indifferent both to the riddle of how Jewish theological and ethical ideas came into being and to the haunting question of their validity and relevance for modern living. This underplaying of the theoretical aspect of religion is easily explained. Faced by pressing practical problems—those of political, economic and social security, of inner morale, of Zionism, of the organization of Jewish life—the Jewish group has tended to disregard theology and ethic as academic and remote. Understandable though it be, this neglect of the history and rationale of the Jewish religion is none the less unfortunate. It is unfortunate, in the first place, for the life of the Jewish group. The religious theme in Judaism has always been simultaneously the driving power behind, and the finest expression of, the Jewish civilization. No Jewishness is complete without religion. What is more, it is unfortunate for the individual. For religion fulfills a specific function in life. It equips the individual with a philosophy of the universe, such as invests his existence with meaning and significance. It provides a sanction for socially-centered living. It enriches life with colorful emotions and poetic rituals. It implants confidence in moral values on the ground that these are no manifestations of human caprice but rather principles that spring from the very character of the universe. The muting of the religious motif in Judaism means an impoverishment of the individual and the group alike.

In his description* of the rise and development of the Jewish religion, Rabbi Morris Goldstein has made his contribution toward restoring religion to its proper place, in the thought-life of Jews. Incredible as it may seem, this book is the first one-volume treatment of the subject in the English language—a fact which gives vivid confirmation to our assertion that religion is the forgotten area in Jewish life. Rabbi Goldstein begins at the beginning by making clear to his reader that he uses the word religion to include theory of the universe plus the morality and ritual which flow from it. The first third of the work is concerned with the religion of the Bible. It traces the growth of Jewish belief and morality from primitive animism to the rise of rabbinic Judaism. Rabbi Goldstein accepts the results of higher criticism. He insists, however, and with justice, on stating both the traditional and the non-traditional interpretations of Scripture. What is equally important, he accepts the conclusions of non-traditional criticism with moderation, putting question marks where question marks belong. At all times he evinces an enthusiastic and communicative reverence for the Bible. The second section entitled "How a Religion Lives On" is a sketch of rabbinic Judaism from the time of the Pharisees to that of the Emancipation. The third and last portion of the book, "How a Religion Faces the Future," describes the impact of modern thought on Jewish religious attitudes, the programs which have been developed for preserving the Jewish religion, the unanswered problems which still await resolution, and the lines along which this resolution seems most attainable.

*Thus Religion Grows* has been written with vivacity and enthusiasm. It is addressed to the uninformed adult and to the mature adolescent. To the former it should prove interesting and edifying

**Thus Religion Grows, The Story of Judaism,* by Rabbi Morris Goldstein. Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1936.

reading. For the latter is should be especially valuable as a basic text for classroom work.

There are, to be sure, a number of failings, generally in detail, which mar an otherwise excellent work. Thus, despite a very apparent concern with accuracy, the book suffers from occasional misstatements, either of fact or interpretation. The description of Hellenistic culture, for example, is definitely unfair to Hellenism. Again, it is not true that in Palestine Rosh Hashonah is observed for only one day. The addition of the *Birchat Minim* by Rabbi Gamaliel to the *Tefillah* made the total of blessings nineteen, not eighteen. The Ophites were themselves a gnostic group and not, as Rabbi Goldstein implies, independent of that movement. Nor were their doctrines those which Rabbi Goldstein ascribes to them. All these, of course, are inaccuracies in unimportant detail. They are nevertheless to be regretted in a book which is so generally exact. The concluding section of the work is particularly inadequate. In it Rabbi Goldstein set himself to evaluate the new problems which face the Jewish religion. He has not succeeded in communicating to his reader a clear comprehension of either their nature or their magnitude.

What is most curious and intriguing about the whole book is the fact that though it professes to be a history of the Jewish religion, it turns out to be a history of the Jewish people written with especial attention to religious concepts. The reader is at first impulse likely to resent the description of apparently irrelevant political and social events, especially when such insertions seem to crowd out the discussion of religion to which the book is dedicated. But a more careful consideration reveals that Rabbi Goldstein could not have done otherwise. For religion is only one aspect of Jewish life, organically interrelated with all other areas of Jewish interest. The religious motif in Judaism cannot be abstracted from the whole for isolated treatment. He who sets out to handle the Jewish religion discovers that whether he will it so or not he must deal with the totality of Jewish life.

Rabbi Goldstein himself is entirely aware of the relationship of the Jewish religion to that organism which is Jewish culture. In the first sentences of his book he speaks of religion as a "pattern of gold boldly woven into the history of the Jew." On its very last page, he asserts categorically that the people of Israel is primary to its religion. To *The Reconstructionist* this blurring of the religious with the social and cultural is especially significant. For we claim that Judaism is a civilization in which religion is one element. We find our position confirmed in this experience of Rabbi Goldstein who set himself to write the history of the Jewish religion and then found himself compelled to write a history of the Jewish people and its entire culture. Rabbi Goldstein is by no means antagonistic to the *Reconstructionist* position. Indeed he indicates some sympathy for it. But larger than any personal profession of adherence to our theory looms the unintentional, and therefore all the more convincing, demonstration that Judaism is an organic civilization.

# Correspondence

SIRS:

D. I. Kap's letter, which was in reply to your editorial, "Appreciating Our Jewish Musicians," clearly supports your contention that our Jews do not know either our Jewish musicians or their works.

Much worthwhile Jewish music has been created since the organization of the Jewish Folk-Song Society in Petrograd in 1909. How many of our people know the many beautiful songs, piano compositions, chamber music works and orchestral works which were then and since composed by such gifted musicians as Moses Milner, Alexander Krein, Joseph Achron—to mention only a few? How many of our people know the beautiful Jewish Violin Concerto by Achron and the Chamber Music works of Rosowsky, Milner (and if I may be permitted to mention some of my own works), my own Jewish orchestral works?

The trouble is not that genius is lacking, as Kap states; it is the lack of opportunity for Jewish musical ability to assert itself. American Jews have done nothing to help present the many Jewish works which have been composed here in this country. They have done nothing towards facilitating the publication of such music, as did the Russian Jews in 1910 by the organization of the famous "Yibneh" and "Yuval" publishing houses, which have published a tremendous amount of wonderful Jewish music. If your critic knew some of this music, he certainly would not mention the sainted Rosenblatt's "Omar Rabbi Elazar" and the orchestral works of Ernest Bloch in one breath, as beautiful as Rosenblatt's "recitative" may be.

I do not blame Kap for speaking in the manner in which he does, for if he really knew Jewish Music, he would join you and Mailamm for the encouragement and development of Jewish music and musicians both here and in Palestine.

A. W. BINDER.

December 9, 1936.
New York, N. Y.

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SIRS:

It seems to me that Reconstructionism has imposed upon itself a phantom dilemma. Shall Reconstructionism make its dent in American Jewish life operating as a constructive school of thought or shall it energize its influence through the technics and instruments of a practical organization?

The scope of Reconstructionism is the whole of Jewish life—its spiritual and physical aspects—"Judaism as a Civilization." The functions of a Reconstructionist organization must therefore become so gargantuan in its operation as to touch the Jew at every focal point in his daily life. It must compel within its fold of membership every earnest Jew who seeks the need of a fuller and richer personal life through his Jewish heritage. It must become a super-organization functioning over, above and through every present-day organization of Jewish activity—"The Federation," the Zionist Organization, organizations of synagogue affiliation, educational institutions, Jewish labor movements, organizations born of varied social and recreational interests. Since Reconstructionism has a well-integrated and all-inclusive philosophy and program of Jewish life, it must become the intellectual motive power directing this life. The immensity of the tasks that would lie before such an organization would dwarf its capacity for effective achievement.

The reorganization of Jewish life in America is dependent upon much more than setting up the mechanics of another organization. It involves the transformation of every institution in Jewish life, philanthropic, religious, educational and social. Such transformations are not within the compass of activities of any single organization. Such transformations are social or religious revolutions and arise from the transformed will and convictions of a people. The Jewish people or enough of the Jewish people must see their personal and group life through the truths of Reconstructionist Judaism to will the transformation of their institutions so that these institutions become a creative force in their lives. They must come to view the great body of Jewish tradition not as the scholarship or blind authority of an evanescent past but as a catalytic agent, an eternal ethical force, endowed with immortal powers to stir society and the individual into richer and more satisfying living.

The "dilemma" of Reconstructionism seeks a definition. What are to be the purposes, limits and scope of a Reconstructionist organization? What are to be the forms and functions that a Reconstructionist organization will assume? What is to be its specific program other than the dissemination of the doctrine that Judaism is a civilization?

Reconstructionism should not be too much concerned with its incapacity to move or persuade the intrenched leaders of Jewish institutions. The future of Reconstructionism lies in the areas of younger men and women. It lies, for instance, in those groups where serious and intelligent men and women are devoting their time and efforts to non-Jewish social movements. Why cannot a Reconstructionist view of Jewish life stir up the zeal and devotion which the Communist cause arouses in its army of young adherents of Jewish birth? It can, but first it must fire their imagination with new visions and new purposes. These visions and purposes cannot be presented through the technics and instruments of an organization unless the sole purpose of such an organization be the widespread dissemination of the goal of a higher personality stirred, motivated and functioning by and through Jewish values. Reconstructionism must remain a militant, yet patient school of thought reaching out through the power of the printed word by ample and vital literary media into wider and wider areas until its thought permeates and motivates a great and earnest body of Jewish men and women.

LEOPOLD J. SNEIDER.

December 11, 1936.
New York, N. Y.